

Greek American Oral History Project

Oral History Interview

with

George Mackis and Elaine Mackis

April 11, 2006
Sacramento, California

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Greek American Oral History Project

Interview History for Oral History of
George and Elaine Mackis

Interviewer's Name: Steven J. Melvin

Interview Date and Location: April 11, 2006, in the Mackis' home in Sacramento, California.

Context Notes: George Mackis is the son of Greek immigrant parents. During the last portion of the interview, his wife, Elaine, spontaneously joined the conversation. She also has at least one Greek immigrant parent. The transcription includes her comments as well, although some are inaudible due to her distance from the microphone. Twice during the interview, the telephone rings, but the tape recorder remains running.

Tapes and Interview Records: The original tape recording of the interview and a full transcript are held by the Greek Orthodox Church of the Annunciation in Sacramento. Copies of the recording and transcript are deposited with the Department of Special Collections and University Archives at California State University, Sacramento.

[Session 1, April 11, 2006]

[Begin Tape 1, Side A]

MELVIN: Okay, It is April 11, 2006, this is an oral history interview with George Mackis, is it Mackis?

G. MACKIS: Correct.

MELVIN: George Mackis, my name is Steven Melvin, and we are at Mr. Mackis' house in Sacramento. The topic of today's interview is the Greek-American community in Sacramento.

Okay George, first we're going to talk a little bit about your parents and your background. First of all, where were you born and when?

G. MACKIS: Sacramento, December 6, '44.

MELVIN: Tell me a little bit about your mother. Where was she born?

G. MACKIS: She was born in Platanos, Greece, in the Peloponnesus area, and she was born in, 1917.

MELVIN: And your father?

G. MACKIS: He was born in Greece, Meligala, in 1894, November 1st.

MELVIN: Can you describe the place in Greece where your parents were from if you know?

G. MACKIS: Yeah, its very similar to California terrain. They are on the same parallel that we are: 36th parallel. Weather is very similar to California, they had the wine, rolling hills, the wine vineyards, olives, its very, very similar to

like Napa Valley, very, very close, and the ocean is right. . .My mom's house is right on the ocean front, very beautiful. My father's, he's more inland, Meligala, and he was raised in Kalamata, then earlier in his years he move to Athens and he worked in his father's painting shop, mixing colors. In 1919, he moved to America, came to Bangor Maine first.

MELVIN: Do you think they came to California because it was so similar?

G. MACKIS: My father's brother, George Stevens, his name was, don't ask me why his name was Stevens. He changed it when he came here. Cliomackis [phonetic] to Stevens, he was here in Hollywood. He had a restaurant, and he came here because his brother was here. That's the only reason.

MELVIN: How did your parents earn a living in Greece?

G. MACKIS: Well, my mother was, when she got married she was 16. I mean she was taken care of. . .household, going to school, what have you, and helping her mother taking care of the younger siblings, she was the oldest, and then my father met her in February of 1936, and they got married three weeks later. She was about 17, 16 - 17 . That's how they got married back then.

MELVIN: What did your father do at the time?

G. MACKIS: He was in restaurants, restaurant business, sixty-four years in the restaurant business in America.

MELVIN: And when did they first come to America?

G. MACKIS: Well my dad came in 1919, worked here until he went back. He'd been back several times to Greece, probably twelve times back and forth. Then in 1936, he had contact with some friends of my mother's family, called the Koustuksu [phonetic] family, and he ended up meeting my mother. It was February the. . .I have it written down here. . .February 5, 1936. They got married February 23, 1936 and they moved back to Hollywood.

MELVIN: OKAY so your father came here first, and went back and got married?

G. MACKIS: Yes, yes, yeah, he went several times to Athens, where his family was living in Athens, and ended up meeting my mother in 1936. From 1919 to 1936 he would , like I said, several times back and forth, it was kind of unheard of in those days. [phone rings] Anyway, pardon me, where were we at? He was in. . .

MELVIN: He was in Hollywood going back and forth?

G. MACKIS: Back and forth to Greece, but like I say it was unheard of back then because my grandfather he was [unintelligible]. He had a lucrative business in Athens selling paints to different. . .doing a lot of construction back in the '36 [unintelligible]. Actually, it was before the war, during the war. A lot of ruins, and they were doing a lot of construction back then. My father was fortunate and he came here, through his father and he came over on a nice cruise ship. Not like going to Ellis Island, that was a nightmare I heard. It was like bringing in cattle, very humiliating for a lot

of folks I would think. I have been there in 1993, we took a trip in '93 and looked at Ellis Island. It is very interesting to see the pictures and the stories and what have you. But, I'm getting off track here.

MELVIN: So, when he came to America he landed in?

G. MACKIS: In New York.

MELVIN: On a cruise ship though?

G. MACKIS: On a regular ship, yeah, he was not cattled in.

MELVIN: And did he intend to stay when he. . .?

G. MACKIS: Yeah, oh yeah.

MELVIN: But he would just go back for visits?

G. MACKIS: Go back to visit his family and friends.

MELVIN: Why did he leave?

G. MACKIS: Well, there were better opportunities here in America. Of course, Greece at the time was going through a lot of turmoil with the war. Well, he was in WWI, I think, he was telling me. He served in the Greek army in the intelligence, in 1914 to 1919, when he came here.

MELVIN: How did he feel about leaving Greece?

Mackin: You know, well to be honest, I don't know. I couldn' answer that question. I never asked him that. That's a good question. I'm sure he was sad to leave his family, he had a big family also, he had a lot of brothers

and sisters. I don't know I couldn't answer that, I never asked my father that.

MELVIN: So when he traveled here did he come alone?

G. MACKIS: Yes.

MELVIN: But he did have a brother here.

G. MACKIS: Brother here in the states, in California, right.

MELVIN: What did he know about the United States before he came or what were his impression of the United States, do you know?

G. MACKIS: No, I don't know.

MELVIN: Did he ever talk to you about the journey? [phone rings]

G. MACKIS: No.

MELVIN: About the trip across the ocean?

G. MACKIS: No not across the ocean, but across America he did. He drove an old model A from Bangor, Maine to California. [Mackis' wife Elaine interjects from other room. Mackis responds.] Yeah, it took him probably, I think he was telling me, six, seven weeks to come across.

MELVIN: That was in 1920 or so?

G. MACKIS: Nineteen. . .it was later on, it was . . .yeah, 19. . ., excuse me lets go back. Well, 1919 he came into Hollywood actually, to be honest I don't know how he got here first and then in '32 he moved to Bangor Maine, and then he drove back in '34. He, my father, loved to travel, he was a traveling

kind of guy. But, back then, you know, you think about it. . . You know, no roads, I mean the only roads they had were mud, dirt roads, what have you. I mean that just think about it, back then, in those days, 1920s and the '30s. It was unheard of to even travel in the '40s they did it by train, and he drove. Pretty interesting.

MELVIN: Truly an adventure. So did he live in Hollywood most of his life?

G. MACKIS: Yeah, like I said he came here in 1919 to Hollywood, and then he went back to Bangor, Maine in '34. Then he went to Greece in '36 and married and came to Phoenix. He knew some Greeks there, some family members, and he worked in the Grand Café for a few years. Then in '39, he moved to Sacramento to christen my sister, my oldest sister Rita, and then they stayed. They liked it and they stayed. Well, they didn't come here and stay. They came here to christen my sister and went back to Phoenix and then they finally moved about a year later, to Sacramento since 1939, '39 '40. They settled, it didn't take them long to move from Phoenix to Sacramento, he loved it here.

MELVIN: And what was his economic condition when he came here to America?

G. MACKIS: He was. . . well like I said his father, my grandfather was financially stable and he helped my father and gave him X amount of dollars. But, he worked all the time, just because his father helped him doesn't mean he slacked. He had three jobs. He was working as a waiter at his restaurant

with his brother, the Irish [unintelligible] Shop at Hollywood and Vine right at the Pantages Theatre when he came here in 1919, up until '34 when he finally sold it. From 1919 to '34 - '35 he was working three or four jobs all the time, I mean non-stop. He slept three or four hours. You know as the Greeks, they enjoy life and liked to party and stuff. He worked, but he liked to enjoy life too and he traveled a lot.

He went back and forth to Greece several times, like I stated before, but he ended up settling in Sacramento in the '40s, after he got married. He left his, he moved, he went to Greece and got married and left my mother in Greece and he moved back. He came back to work and she finally came over on the Queen Mary in 1936 about three months later. Then he came to Phoenix where they were staying and she didn't like it at all. Well, you think about it, 16 years old marrying someone you don't even know, and you ended up staying married for how many years, sixty years, plus.

My mom passed away in 2003, she fell and broke both of her arms, unfortunately her demise was six months later. My father, he was a happy go lucky guy, big smile all the time, 5'2". My mom was about an inch or two taller, 5' 4 or 5, cute couple. But, they were, yeah, go back. . .they came to Sacramento. I mean she took the Queen Mary to New York, and took the train from New York to Phoenix and she didn't like it at all. She

left her beautiful village in Greece on the ocean, why would you want to live here? Then they moved to Sacramento, and she liked it, obviously. She had four; they had four kids, two boys, and two girls. My oldest sister lives in Greece, my two other siblings, my brother he's the second lives right around the corner here, and my other sister lives in Sacramento. So, we're a close knit family. I'm sorry, I'm going off here.

MELVIN: That's fine, that's fine. So your father, when he first arrived here he began earning a living working in restaurants right away?

G. MACKIS: Right away, yes, right away, 1919, and every since then he had restaurants up until he retired when he was 90 some years old when he retired. I said, "Its time to for you to stop working pop." Sixty-five, Sixty-four years he was in the restaurant business, he had then all over Sacramento,

MELVIN: Apparently, hard work is the secret to longevity.

G. MACKIS: Hard work, yeah. He was always. . .says moderation, if you want to have a shot of Metaxa in the morning it is Okay, but moderation. You've got to take care of your body, he said, you've got to remember what you put in. Put in the good stuff. [laughs] Not too much, too much drinking, too much smoking, he never smoked. He wasn't a big drinker at all. You know, when you go to the parties, I'm sure you've been to some Greek functions. We enjoy our fellowship.

MELVIN: Did he know English when he came here?

G. MACKIS: Very little, very little, most Greeks didn't know. . .but maybe Italian, French. He knew a little German, because the war, he was in intelligence. Actually, he knew more German than the other languages. Like I said, he was in the. . .and he knew Bulgarian, Greek, Italian, French. But, when he came here to America he didn't have a choice. He had to learn the language.

MELVIN: How did he learn?

G. MACKIS: Radios, people, Lolita Gray, that ended up marrying Charlie Chaplin. She was about, young, ten years old, and her mother and grandmother used to work for my dad. My dad didn't speak English.

MELVIN: They were Greek?

G. MACKIS: No, they just worked for my dad. They were waitresses in my dad's restaurant, Irish [unintelligible] Shop, Hollywood and Vine and here's Lolita Gray, telling my dad, "This is salt, pepper, blah, blah, blah, hello, goodbye. That's how he learned the language. Later on he started reading, and radio came into play, and she ended up marrying Charlie Chaplin. She used to take. . .my dad used to take her for rides around Hollywood and go up to where the stars lived, up in Beverly hills and say, "That's such and such's house." And, what's his name? One of the Fairbanks, Jr. or Sr., "And that's his house, and that's Charlie Chaplin's house." Three or four years later, she was 15 years old when he married

her, Charlie Chaplin, I think, I'm not quite right on the age. I know she wasn't more than 16 years of age. She ended up marrying him. She came into the restaurant, "Andy, Andy, guess what, I got married to Charlie Chaplin," My dad said, "Oh my goodness." [laughs] She was a young girl. Anyway, a lot of interesting stories.

MELVIN: Did they pursue American citizenship?

G. MACKIS: Oh yes, oh yes, definitely, that was their main goal. He got his citizenship. . .early on in time. It was probably in the late '20s early '30s. You know it took him a few years, but takes them ten, five, ten years, I would think.

MELVIN: So that was important?

G. MACKIS: Very important. Yeah, to him, yeah. Maybe it was earlier. If I told you, I would be lying to you. Maybe, cause I don't know exactly when he got it. I'm sure he mentioned it to me but that wasn't. . .I should have made it a point. That was pretty important. I'm sure my brother would know, or my little sister. But, anyway, I'm sure it was the late 20s.

MELVIN: Did he ever talk about things he missed most about Greece, or your mother too?

G. MACKIS: Well my mother missed her family a lot, her brothers and sisters and mom and dad. He never really talked about too much of his family. His mother and father, of course he missed, and his siblings were, most of them stayed in Greece and raised families. They were from a background of music, one

was a doctor, and one was a lawyer. The girls were teachers, both teachers; one was a judge. They had it made pretty good.

If you didn't have money in Europe or Greece you were a second, third class citizen. Over here. . .that's why he came here. You don't have that over here, you still see it in some places. We don't have that. You can have millions of dollars or nothing and you could be talking to each other. Over there, you don't. They have first, second, third class citizens and its a shame. Its very heartbreaking when you go over there.

I've been over there a few times. I've been there and you still see it. My father took the family in 1960. We drove from Sacramento to New York in an old, well it wasn't old, it was a brand new 1960 Chrysler station wagon. We drove it all the way to New York, and put it on a boat, and went over to Greece, on the boat. In 14 days, we got there, in Athens, Arpedia. As soon as I got off the boat, we went to go home again the next night, and the next day we went to a restaurant and you see it. The second and third class citizens, and I was only 15 years old and you don't really understand it until you experience it. Its a shame.

We went back in 1979, 1980 it think it was, with my family, my wife and I, and my son who was four years old, and my father and mother. My dad was a great tour guide, but you go into and I'll give you an example. You go into a bank, and I was standing in line and here this

Greek comes up and walks in front of you. I said, "Excuse me; we're standing in line here." He said, "So." And I said, "Excuse me, you said what?" I said, "We're not jackasses; get back in line like everybody else." And everybody started clapping. He was all dressed up in a suit and I kind of went to touch him, and I thought I better not touch him because I didn't want to have no fights. I said, "Please these people have been waiting just as long as everyone else." He said, "I have business here." I said, "Everyone else does too, get back in the line." First class. "I'm a doctor." Whatever. They have that arrogance. It is very interesting.

MELVIN: Did your parents maintain contact with people in Greece?

G. MACKIS: Oh yes, definitely, phone.

MELVIN: And they traveled back frequently? How often?

G. MACKIS: Well, they got married in '36 and I don't think they went back to Greece until 1960. But my dad was going. I think my dad went back himself between '36 and '50. I think he went back a couple of times alone, his father wasn't doing very good. But, my mom, we went. . .she didn't go back until 1960, with us and the whole family. Pretty interesting.

MELVIN: You took the car too?

G. MACKIS: And the car, drove all over. Not only Greece, Italy, France, Germany, Swiss, Yugoslavia. It was an experience for me because I didn't go to school there. I got back and I was behind and I took a test and they go,

“You know you’re a freshman in high school and you should be a junior or senior.” And I go, “why’s that?” “Because the tests that you took, you just aced them.” High school, for me, was easy. But, I wasn’t an A student, because I was Mr. Cool back in the ‘50 and ‘60s. You think you’re hot stuff, you know, because I went to Europe.

I tell kids now days, education is very important. All these young kids they can’t pass their tests, their exit exams. What does that tell you? So, I was one of them. You know, we had a good life. My parents provided for us. We had a car, we had a beautiful home, we had everything, all the amenities. There are a lot of people that are unfortunate in this world, even in Sacramento. America, it is pretty sad.

MELVIN: Did they ever talk about having difficulties adjusting to life in America?

G. MACKIS: My mother did a little bit yeah; it was hard for her. She didn’t speak the language that well because she was a homemaker, raising four kids, from ‘38 to 1949. In ten years, they had four kids, and she was raising them and she was working in the restaurant when we were getting older. I used to take my little sister, she was five years younger, and I used to treat her terrible, like a brother would. I used to take her and put her in a box. She was about three years old, and tape the box up and, “Where’s Penny?” I’d say, “I don’t know.” And you hear this [makes rustling noise] in the back storage room of the restaurant right over here at Alhambra and a L Street.

We had the restaurant right across the street from Bank of America where Safeway is. The restaurant is still there, but the Alhambra is gone, beautiful. We used to play there all the time, and I would tape the box up and you would hear, it was like a cat inside, and she would, "Mommy," "Who did this?" "I don't know?" Used to blame it on me. I don't know why. [laughs] But we had a good time.

The restaurant, take example, over here by the Alhambra, it was called Andy's Dinner House, when it was a restaurant, a very well known restaurant in Sacramento back then. He had it in the '40s throughout. . . I think he sold it 1959, '58 when I was going to St. Francis when I was a kid. We lived right over here in Tahoe Park on 2nd avenue and 59th. We ended up selling that and that's when we went to Greece in 1960.

MELVIN: Can you tell me the names and birth years of your siblings?

G. MACKIS: Yeah, my oldest sister Rita, she was born in 1938, August 23, or excuse me, July the 15th. And Steve, my brother, he was the second, December 20, 1940. And myself December 6, 1944, and my little sister Penny was born August 23, 1949.

MELVIN: Ok. Tell me about the houses or house where you grew up?

G. MACKIS: We grew up right over here in Sacramento on 2nd avenue and 59th, a couple of blocks off 59th street. It was a three bedroom one bath, small home; it wasn't a big home, big back yard, lot of good memories. We used

to have Easter. My dad used to do the big lamb on a spit. We had a lot of family friends used to come over for Easter and Christmas, what have you.

From there he bought an acre and a half on Northrop and Fulton. He bought that right after the flood, '50. I don't know if you are from Sacramento, but we had a flood right before Folsom was built, Folsom finished in '55, '54, '55, '56. I think they started filling it, before that. Fulton Avenue used to flood periodically. So, we bought this acre and a half, or my mom and dad bought it in 1955. I think we moved in right after the flood and you could see the water, where it was, and where it went down. Fulton Avenue was a two-lane road, and we were up on a little tiny hill. Fulton was flooded a little bit, not bad, you could still drive through and we stayed there from '55 to '63.

I just graduated from high school. We moved out to Carmichael, we bought this huge house and stayed there until I was married in '71 and I moved out and bought this house. Great memories, fond memories, we weren't dysfunctional. I mean there are always families that are dysfunctional what have you, but he brought, he always, my dad's motto: "Always be nice to everybody, be friendly with everybody, love one another, number one, love one another." He was. . .[Mackis becomes emotional] anyway, he always instilled in the family to love one another.

MELVIN: Were there other Greeks in these neighborhoods that you lived in?

G. MACKIS: Oh yes, we had the Ciopodus [phonetic] family, the Fotos family, the Stathos family. You'll interview Nick, and Gus, and Tommy. Oh yeah, we use to, basically, we had a lot of church members when we were going to Greek School. I never went to Sunday school, because on Sunday I was an alter boy at the church on N Street. Then we built this church in '54 or '55, and I was an alter boy. But, all of these kids, the Fotoses, the Stathoses, Ciopoduses [phonetic] and, me with my sister, we all grew up together, Dmitri and Eugene. Eugene would be a great guy to interview. He's very knowledgeable. I'm sure somebody else is. I'm going off again tell me when to stop.

MELVIN: That's fine, where did you go to school?

G. MACKIS: I went to Encina High School, graduated in '63. I went to Tahoe School. . First, I started St. Francis, Tahoe, then Wintersteen, Arden Elementary and then Encina. Then I went to American River, and Sac. City, and Sac. State, for about a semester. Until, well, back then if you weren't doing good, even if you were getting good grades, I hate to say it, the Iranians, I don't know if you remember back in the late sixties before Vietnam, well, mid '60s, if you weren't, I mean I was a Sacramentan and I couldn't got to school. It was sad, my grades were fine, "Sorry, we cant have you come here," "What? This is b.s." You know, its kind of sad.

MELVIN: Because there were too many students there?

G. MACKIS: Well, they were bringing in the Iranians, and they had the money, kind of sad. I don't know the background of it but it kind of left a bad taste in my mouth. I started going to work and I went to work for a pharmacy, and I got my license cutting hair. I ended up working at the capital for almost twenty years and I retired at the legislature.

MELVIN: When you were growing up were your parents strict about your academic performance?

G. MACKIS: Oh yeah, very strict. I didn't have a choice, but I kind of got around it. There was four kids, my sister, "You better do your homework George." "I did it." Of course my parents used to take you backhand, [slapping sound] slap you on the face a little bit. Now you do that and go to jail. [laughs]

I think, anyway, they were very strict. We had to go to Greek School. We had to go to school everyday. If you're sick, not good enough, you better get your butt up. Even when I was growing up in my teenage years, I used to work at the restaurant, "Mom, Dad I'm tired, please." Blankets come off, "Get up." Didn't have a choice. This guy was five-foot-two but he was a giant. You don't talk back at the Greek parents. They were very into education, but unfortunately, I never pursued mine like I should have. I try to instill this to the kids, my son, and they're still

struggling. Kids they have their own agendas. They were very into education; they wanted us to succeed in life.

MELVIN: Now what was Greek School? Was that something that happened after regular school?

G. MACKIS: Right, after school everyday, I think, except Saturday and Sunday, you would go there for three or four hours.

MELVIN: Where was that, at the church?

G. MACKIS: At the church, yeah, growing up.

MELVIN: What would you learn there?

G. MACKIS: Greek, read and write.

MELVIN: Greek history too?

G. MACKIS: Greek history too, March. . .25th was a big day. Religion, you would learn a lot of the religion. I've been singing in choir for 45 years. My wife and I we met in choir, in church. The thing of it is in Greek School, well its not just only Greek, learning reading and writing, but the history and where you came from. There is a lot of history and Greeks brought a lot to this country: democracy, philosophy, science. I mean all kinds of stuff and look where they are at now, struggling. Back 2000, back, philosophers, they're amazing. I mean, you just look at the history back 2000 years ago. I mean, my god how did they build the Parthenon? How did they do this? Its amazing, its just mind boggling. When you go there and see these

buildings, 2000 years. I don't know if you've ever been to Europe, but if you ever go Steven, it is like you're in awe. You see this column that you can't even put your arms around. I'm going off on a tangent again.

Getting back to the Greek School, you know they teach you a lot. They taught us the history, the orthodox faith, our teacher was, his name was Kidiaku Anastasiu [phonetic], which is a heavy duty Greek name. He was a character, very good, beautiful singer. He was our cantor at church and our Greek School teacher. He taught you a lot. He taught us the hymns of the church, which, if you didn't sing it, say it or sing it, you would get your ears pulled and your face slapped at the same time. So, you had no choice unless you wanted to get you ass kicked everyday [laughs], or slapped. I was a little 5-6 year old growing up. I was his teachers pet. I learned and thank god, because now I sing the hymns and I know them by heart. Its amazing, and you think that the stuff that you learn when you are a kid, you use it, I use it every Sunday.

During Lent, this is our Lent period, can't eat, well you know there are a lot of people that eat whatever they want to eat. But its a . . .each individual . . ., but its a beautiful transition. You start the presanctified liturgies, forty days prior to Easter and the last week of Easter, Holy Week is just beautiful. Thank God they kept the Greek. I have to say, I used to go to Catholic school, and I loved the service when I was a little kid.

[Now] you go to Catholic church, I don't know if you're Catholic or not, its just, what happened, what happened to the beautiful Latin. You take now; they want to change the Greek to all English. You know what we do, the choir, we still sing in Greek. The priest wants to do it in English, we respond in Greek. They mostly do it in Greek, the liturgies; they do a little English, which is Okay because they are converts. But anyway, stop me because I am going off on a tangent.

MELVIN: No, no, its ok. That's what we want. Did you have any other after school activities besides Greek School?

G. MACKIS: When I was growing up, not really. Later on when I was getting older, I was in my teens, early teens, boy scouts, stuff like that. My dad always thought that was the American way; you have to. I went to. . .he said you have to go to the army. In 1967, I was drafted to go to Vietnam and I was one of the lucky ones, I was lucky, Steven. That was the worst time to go. I went in to be inducted in Oakland and this doctor friend of ours said, "You don't want to go to Vietnam," and I said, "Daaaaa, who does?"
[noise in background]

So, I was going to college and I didn't go one semester and they hooked me. You had to stay in school and they wouldn't take you. So, I slacked I was one of those slackers that year. That pissed me off. Anyway, I went to go down and my friend said, "Your wrist is bad," I said, "Yeah."

I use to play city league here in Sacramento for many years, hardball, and I screwed up my wrist and I don't have full function. I still could shoot, pull the trigger. I wanted to go for my country. I mean you had to. Nobody wanted to go, unless you parents forced you. My dad didn't really force me, but he said you had to go do your duty. So, I lucked out. I got a friend of ours, a doctor friend, he just got back, he said, "You don't want to go here's a letter. I'm your doctor. Your wrist is screwed up." I got out, 4f, thank God. What was the question?

MELVIN: We'll go on to the next one. How about your friends as a kid, were all of your friends Greek?

G. MACKIS: Yeah, most of my friends were Greek. The Fotos family lived right on 38th Street. Let's see, who else? The Fotoses, Dracoses, Franguses, [phonetic] [wife Elaine Mackis enters room] Miniguses [phonetic]. I was young, and of course, I had kids in grammar school and in high school, a lot of friends. I enjoy people. Our parents always taught us to love one another and to love everybody. Doesn't make any difference if your are white, black, blue, pink. Even back, it was before your time, we had the pachucos, remember?

E. MACKIS: The what?

G. MACKIS: You know, pachucos you called them.

MELVIN: Mexicans?

G. MACKIS: Well, not really, you don't call, I mean. . .

[End Tape 1, Side A]

[Begin Tape 1, Side B]

G. MACKIS: It was a term used in the 50s, late 50s. They had their hair slicked back, and the hot rods, and they would wear Levis leather jackets and they would call them. . . Anyway, we were like the ivy leaguers.

E. MACKIS: Like the frats and the hearts.

G. MACKIS: Like the frats and the hearts. Thank you. But, we called them pachucos.

E. MACKIS: I never heard that.

G. MACKIS: Anyway, we had one black kid in our high school and he was half black and half white. Anyway, what was your question?

MELVIN: We were just talking about your friends.

G. MACKIS: I had a lot of friends, mostly Greeks. I played football, track, baseball, soccer. Unfortunately, I wish I would have never done that because I can't walk now.

E. MACKIS: Pole vaulting.

G. MACKIS: High jumping. Look at me now! "You did all of that?" No, it was a lot of fun. We had a lot of good times with both kids from school and the kids from our community. I played sports in our community too: basketball and soccer. I played a lot of soccer with the Elas team and the Greek team, Larry [unintelligible], all the people that used to. . .

MELVIN: Did your parents have aspirations for you growing up? Did your dad want you to go into the restaurant business too?

G. MACKIS: No, no, no. He wanted me to be a doctor. Oh yeah, look at me now. No, no, no, we're fine. Like I said, academically, your parents always want you to be the best. Be the doctor, lawyer, whatever. Its like the Paras' you're going to interview them. Helen and Genny Repp, and Helen Paras, very nice people. I mean, they are sweethearts. They've got a lot of background and different families that just. . .I lost my track again. I'm sorry.

MELVIN: Its Okay We get the best stuff when you lose track. What were your aspirations in high school, what did you want to be?

G. MACKIS: Party! I missed the boat someplace there. You know, your friends, "Come on Mackis, let's go party man, let's go have a beer." I wished I would have listened to my parents. Parents are always right like they say.

MELVIN: What did you do after high school?

G. MACKIS: I went to American River--partied. I went and just got the general subjects, what have you. I was working at Afflec Pharmacy. . . [to wife:] Wasn't I then? . . .for six years. I should have pursued that, but working six years in a pharmacy is boring.

MELVIN: As a pharmacist?

G. MACKIS: Yeah, I mean, I wasn't a pharmacist. I was working as a helper. Actually, I was doing everything they were doing, but I didn't have my license. It was boring Steven.

E. MACKIS: There's no good jobs.

G. MACKIS: Not really, my job was boring. I went to beauty school.

E. MACKIS: Saved The Parthenon.

G. MACKIS: Because my brother and sister opened a beauty salon right over hear on 56th and H. My brother ended up going to. . .

E. MACKIS: Couldn't take pressure.

G. MACKIS: . . .Alaska and my sister and I went to beauty school and got our licenses.

E. MACKIS: Younger sister.

G. MACKIS: Yeah, Penny. We got our license and kept the beauty shop going.

E. MACKIS: They would have lost a lot of money that they put into it.

G. MACKIS: Yeah, I mean it was called The Parthenon.

E. MACKIS: His brother's a real reliable person.

G. MACKIS: Anyway, ahhhhh, [to wife:] You're killing me honey. What was I saying?

I went to beauty school and I worked there until 1986. [to wife:] I ran it for how many years? From 1969 – '70, by the time I got my license it was '70. I didn't have my license until. . .but I was running the place with my sister. We finally got our license and went ahead and stayed there until '86. Then my brother stayed there for a couple. . .I had people renting

chairs from me and we ended up moving, selling it getting rid of it. Then we opened up a little shop a couple of years, '84 -'85 and we had this little place over here on Bear Flag Way. Then in '86, I got a job over here at the assembly side, Assembly Sergeant at Arms. I was there until 1986 March, to 2003 November, and I retired.

MELVIN: Could you describe the local Greek community when you were growing up?

G. MACKIS: Sure. . .

MELVIN: Was there a concentration of business somewhere, or sort of a focal point for the community?

G. MACKIS: You know what we were doing?

E. MACKIS: Well, a lot of Greeks lived in this neighborhood.

G. MACKIS: A lot of Greeks, yeah.

MELVIN: In this neighborhood?

G. MACKIS: In this neighborhood, yes, and there still are. A lot of them have passed away, but they are still around, the families are still here. Could you explain what kind of . . . What do you want to know? I'm sorry.

MELVIN: Were there Greek shops that were concentrated in one area?

G. MACKIS: Not really.

MELVIN: Or was it spread out? [Was there] a Greek town? You know how some ethnic groups have a china town.

E. MACKIS: Too spread.

G. MACKIS: You know what they had in Sacramento. They had Zorba the Greek. When we were growing up, when we were going to choir, that was our, you know. Every Thursday night we had to go to choir, then after that, we used to go out to Mel's Drive-in. We were young kids, I was younger, of course, and my sister was too young to join the choir. I was the youngest, but my sister and my brother you know. . .

E. MACKIS: That was the only outlet though.

G. MACKIS: That was the only outlet.

E. MACKIS: Parents wouldn't let you go out with anybody else, or go to a non-Greek house. So, that was the only way we could get out of the house was to go join choir. They allowed that.

G. MACKIS: So all three of us were in choir: my sister Rita, Steve, and myself. My sister was too young, Penny, my little sister, was too young to join. Later on, she joined. Our outlet was going to choir practice to meet all of the other young kids. Then we used to go out to Mel's Drive-in and come home, and later on Zorba the Greek. In the late. . .mid 60s, mid 60s?

E. MACKIS: Eppies.

G. MACKIS: We used to go to Eppies after choir practice, Eppie Johnson, that closed up, for coffee. For years we used to do that, and we used to go to Zorba the Greek on weekends.

MELVIN: Where was that?

G. MACKIS: Downtown, K Street Mall, right next to the Esquire, in the cellar. I used to teach dancing there, and my wife and I used to perform.

MELVIN: Greek dancing?

G. MACKIS: Where's that picture? Anyway, I used to teach on Sunday night and then Friday and Saturday night Elaine and I used to perform, dancing. We used to put on a show.

E. MACKIS: Well, it was more than us.

G. MACKIS: Well, we had a group. But, we used to put on. . .you and I used to put on a little show there.

MELVIN: Did you work for tips?

E. MACKIS: No, nothing.

G. MACKIS: No tips, for fun. It was a small community.

E. MACKIS: They didn't have the dance groups that they have now. We were the only dance group [unintelligible]. If they had a Greek thing they used to ask us to come and dance. We were the only ones.

G. MACKIS: Our name was The Olympians. We used to dance from the 1960s to 1987. We used to dance every food festival. I used to wear my toga and we used to serve and go and put on our choir robes and sing and the concert. . .

E. MACKIS: The food festival was here at the church.

G. MACKIS: . . . was here at the church, and we used to go and perform and all this time I was wearing a toga. If the sewers backed up, I'm here cleaning out. . . We are like a family, everybody's like a family, if you don't help each other no body is going to. Everybody has to help. Its a nonprofit thing, its for a church. We did that for years, for years.

We were growing up and finally they asked us he said, "You know were going to have a dance federation." Father Angelis wanted us to go down and perform in San Diego. This was thirty years ago, I'm sixty-two, I'll be sixty two this year, and it was thirty years ago, I was thirty-one, thirty-two. I said, "If I perform and compete against younger kids, I think that's kind of unfair." Because I've been dancing for most of my life. Ever since I was a young kid and I've been teaching.

I used to teach at Sac State and at Davis and the Y.M.C.A. for years. I taught, that was my side, that wasn't even my full time job, that was just part time. I've done that for years and then father says, "Go down to San Diego and compete and I know you guys will do good." I said, "I can't do that." Its unfair. Its just like me competing against an Olympic champion. I'm not saying we were that good. We were good. We used to perform, we used to get paid, professionally, we were doing that not for fun. At some part, we used to do a lot of Cancer League Society for free.

E. MACKIS: Those, if it was for anything for the church [unintelligible].

G. MACKIS: The church we did for free, and the cancer we did for free, all over. The Camellia Festival, that they just had, we used to perform.

E. MACKIS: That was a big thing, that Camellia Festival.

G. MACKIS: That was a big thing. We used to put on huge shows, beautiful shows. One year they were honoring Greece and I put on a fantastic, I put on a great show.

E. MACKIS: At the Memorial Auditorium, they even had thunder and lightning and Zeus coming out.

G. MACKIS: They had it at the Memorial Auditorium. They had thunder and lightning and Zeus coming out. It was beautiful.

MELVIN: What year was that about?

G. MACKIS: 1970.

E. MACKIS: No, we weren't married.

G. MACKIS: We weren't married? About '69. It was a pretty big production.

E. MACKIS: Then remember Anthony Quinn?

G. MACKIS: Anthony Quinn, I used to dance with, well. . .

E. MACKIS: We adopted him as a Greek, he wasn't Greek but. . .

G. MACKIS: Well, when he was doing Zorba he came to Sacramento and they called me and said, "Georgie, you wanna come down? Anthony Quinn is doing such and such and blah blah." I forget, it was. . . anyway it was Anthony Quinn and Dana. . . Dana somebody, and anyway. . . I ended up dancing

Zorba with him, with three or four thousand people watching. It was pretty neat. We went out there and danced, him and I. Who else? Just him and I, I guess.

MELVIN: Did members of your family belong to the American Hellenic Progressive Association or the Greek American Progressive Association?

G. MACKIS: They were in the AHEPA, daughters of Penelope it was called, and my mother and my dad was in the AHEPA. There's a GAPA and then there's AHEPA, American Professional Society and Greek American and then there's . . .

MELVIN: GAPA is Greek American.

G. MACKIS: My dad always donated to those guys, but he was in the AHEPA. So am I, and so is my wife.

MELVIN: Can you tell me about AHEPA?

G. MACKIS: Well, they do a lot of fundraisers for underprivileged children. They give to some of the politicians, they give some of the percentage, but basically they do a lot of the cancer for the children, the underprivileged children the sick and homeless. Its a good organization. Its not only for the Greeks its for. . .A lot of professional people are involved too. We belong to the professional society. What is it called? At the state college Angelo Tsakopoulos. I've know him for years, ever since he didn't have a penny

to his name. My dad used to drive him to school, and I used to sit in the car and listen to all of his stuff. I was a young kid.

E. MACKIS: When he was Chiko [phonetic]. He changed his name.

G. MACKIS: His name was Angelo Chiko [phonetic] and he changed it to Tsakopolous. That's his real name. Back then, when you came to America, you can't use your Greek name. It was Cliomackis [Mackis' Greek name]. My wife's maiden name was Moustakis [phonetic], and her father was from Greece too, from Volvus [phonetic] in fact.

MELVIN: So, there was prejudice against Greeks?

G. MACKIS: Oh yeah.

E. MACKIS: Oh yeah, a lot.

G. MACKIS: And not only that, a lot of prejudice. Not only the Greeks, the Italians, and the Jewish people. You know that. Its unfortunate, you know, we still have it, after all of these years. But, its getting better, a little better every year. But, that's why they changed it, Stathos-- Statholopoulos, my dads name was Cliomackis [phonetic].

E. MACKIS: Did you tell him about the restaurant, the Irish Café? Because if they put a Greek name they wouldn't go.

G. MACKIS: You say, "Cliomackis Restaurant, what they heck is that?" They say, "What is that?" Dirty Greeks, greasy Greeks they used to call them.

E. MACKIS: Well, it was Oxi that changed everything.

G. MACKIS: Oh yeah, in 1941.

E. MACKIS: When the Greeks said "No" to the Germans.

MACKIS: But that's something else honey.

E. MACKIS: I know, but that's when Greeks got respect.

G. MACKIS: Yeah they got a little respect. Actually, 1821 when they got the respect, from the Turks. The Turks. . .it liberated. . .they came into Greece and they just took over. You know the story of the Ottoman.

MELVIN: Yeah.

G. MACKIS: They desecrated so many people. And, we have our church in Constantinople and we can't even use it. Its a Mosque, and you go there and start doing your cross and praying. . .you can't. . .the Muslims, or the guards will come and arrest you, or tell you to stop singing or whatever. That's our church, our first church.

E MACKIS: That's another story.

MELVIN: Good, I think I just have one more question. How has the Greek American community changed in you lifetime here in Sacramento?

G. MACKIS: Oh boy. Basically, it hasn't changed too much.

E. MACKIS: We've been in it so long, its like we just know it one way.

G. MACKIS: It hasn't really changed that much to be honest.

E. MACKIS: We still have the same friends.

G. MACKIS: Technology has changed us. Its still the same. . .everything is the same.

E. MACKIS: Except now that our grandparents and parents have passed away and a lot of the old customs aren't there. The good cooks, they're dying.

G. MACKIS: Yeah, they're dying off. That's what I see is changing. We're losing a lot of the heritage, all the cooking. I miss my moms cooking and I miss my dads cooking. My dad was a great cook too; my mom was too. A lot of the Greek old families they're going bye-bye. The younger kids are not doing the traditional. We're still doing that. We still have the lamb, we still follow our religious beliefs and our ethnic background. Its still the same. The only thing I see changing is the recipes are going aside.

E. MACKIS: Its hard to teach our grandkids Greek, they are so exposed to American. For our parents, that's all they taught because that's all, they were more comfortable speaking that.

G. MACKIS: See, we didn't have the technology we have now back in the 50s and 60s. Now you stay at home and you learn everything about the world right here, right in your living room.

MELVIN: Is there still a Greek School?

G. MACKIS: Oh yes, we still have the Greek School. Its still the same. We haven't changed too much.

E. MACKIS: But if you don't speak it every single day, its not the same.

G. MACKIS: But they still have that. We still have our Greek School; we still have our dance program, which has gotten better. That's one thing I can say, is that

our dance program has gotten better, and our choir has gotten better. .
.because we are singing there. [laughs] No. . .my wife has a beautiful
voice, and 45 years we have been singing in the same choir. I'm very
fortunate in that we have a fantastic director.

But, you know something, Steve? Its the same thing, but its
probably getting a little better. But, I can't say that it has changed that
much. The only thing that has changed is technology has changed, and the
kids have gotten spoiled rotten, young kids. I have to include my son in
that category. Its kind of. . .they are pushing the. . .the teachings of what
our parents used to do back then and the little bit of. . .

E. MACKIS: Well, our parents went through major tough times and we went with them,
and we viewed the tough times.

G. MACKIS: We were with them.

E. MACKIS: Our kids didn't have that, we didn't want them to have tough times.

G. MACKIS: We want them to have better things.

E. MACKIS: So, they don't know the hard part.

G. MACKIS: Yeah, they don't. We used to walk backwards in the snow. [laughs] No,
you know what I'm saying. Kids have everything. I mean what would we
do without telephones, cell phones now. Back then, we didn't know what
that was. The only thing that has changed is technology, the same thing.
We have basically our heritage, we keep our religion, our love of god, our

holidays, same thing, and we try to instill that in our kids. We try to instill all of that in our kids and grandkids.

You get people married out of. . .nothing against non-Greeks, but a lot of non-Greeks. . .I was reading an article of one of our parishioners and he's a non-Greek. He says, "I've gone to Catholic, and this, and Protestant," and he came into [unintelligible] the church of the wedding and he said, "Gosh, this is where I want to be." And, he came back the next time, for a funeral, and everybody is loving and family and friendship and food and drinks and blah blah. It hasn't changed Steven. Everything is still the same.

E. MACKIS: Actually, our kids know Greek, my son, and my nieces and nephew, but the grandkids.

G. MACKIS: The grandkids are kind of. . .We're trying to keep it instilled in them that they have to learn the Greek.

E. MACKIS: Its hard to speak Greek, to remember to speak Greek.

G. MACKIS: Even myself, if I don't speak Greek. . .I speak Greek, my wife, we both speak Greek fluently, write it and everything, read it. But, if you don't read it everyday, you lose it a little bit, just like Spanish. I know Italian, Greek, English, French, a little German. You teach that to yourself.

E. MACKIS: Its amazing how you can lose English in a way. If you go to another country and speak that language. I was there for six months one time, I knew English, came back on the ship, and somebody asked me something. Nobody knew English when I went in '58 and somebody asked me a question. I had to think it first in Greek and then in English and then answer. Just like now, I have to think the opposite to answer in Greek. Its amazing how fast you lose it.

MACKIS: That's why we try to instill in our kids to learn. Don't forget you heritage and where you come from number one. You have to keep that in your. . .I'm glad that he married a really nice girl who is mostly Greek, Pantasian [phonetic] family and the Conalis family. But, her mother is half Greek and half Italian, she's Catholic, nothing wrong with Catholic.

E. MACKIS: She doesn't know Greek.

G. MACKIS: She doesn't know Greek, see.

E. MACKIS: They're like second generation. They're not really first generation. So, each generation loses some.

G. MACKIS: My daughter in law, Summer, she knows a little Greek and she wants to get our grandson involved. We christened him last Saturday. Was it last Saturday? Two Saturdays ago.

E. MACKIS: We tried to get some Greek videos, but unless they hear it all the time.

G. MACKIS: If we don't do it, no one is going to do it. If families don't do it, their parents or grandparents, the kids, they won't know. But, we are still teaching. We are still teaching our kids the backgrounds, where they come from.

E. MACKIS: Even in Greece they are losing it. They talk Greeklish now. That's the new name now. Even their magazines have a lot of English.

MACKIS: Yeah, its Greeklish they call it. My sister lives there and her son just came here in August. We took him around to Vegas, and we went all over. He goes, "Uncle we don't speak Greek over there, we speak Greeklish, like I am speaking to you now. We don't speak full on Greek anymore." I said, "That's a shame." It is, but the thing of it is, my sister is very strict, well, strict enough to teach her son to stay in school and get your degree. He speaks a little German and French, the Katharevousa in Greek is Katharevousa, the true Greek he speaks, which is good to learn because the Katharevousa, which means the clean, the clear Greek, the declared Greek, is very hard, very hard to learn that.

He does know that my dad taught me, that her father, he came to this country and he didn't have nothing. He was a, what was he, a bookkeeper in Greece? He spoke beautiful Greek; he wrote beautiful Greek, numbers and everything. He came here and he was selling ice cream and hot dogs in New York.

E. MACKIS: He doesn't want to here this story.

G. MACKIS: He does. Sure he does. A lot of Greeks came here with a lot of expectations too.

E. MACKIS: It wasn't easy to come here. Even though my mother was born here, even then, they were [unintelligible]. After the Christian, after the war, for six months waiting to get on the ship, my mom was seven months pregnant with me when she did finally get on the ship. And, they were going to send my father, they were married, to Canada. My mom could stay here, but he was going to go to Canada for three years before he could come to be a citizen, but he wasn't going to be a citizen, just to come to the U.S. Because my mother was seven months pregnant with me, they let him stay to take care of her, even though he had a sister here.

MACKIS: Other than that, they wouldn't let him.

E. MACKIS: Her sister wouldn't let the husband, she was born here too, would let her husband come and he stayed for three years in Greece, George. She had one daughter here and they kept the oldest daughter in Greece with them. So, for three years she didn't have a husband here because you had to come here legally. They followed all of the legal things about immigration that why I'm like. . .

G. MACKIS: Watching this on TV now.

E. MACKIS: The illegal thing. . .come here legally.

G. MACKIS: All of our forefathers. . .Greeks, Italians, Irish.

E. MACKIS: Yeah, they went through a lot to. . .It wasn't easy, you just didn't come across the ocean and you could be here.

G. MACKIS: Yeah, they fought to be here.

E. MACKIS: You had to give papers. Even from Ellis Island, my grandmother and grandfather came through there. You had to have papers.

G. MACKIS: And, you had to have a sponsor. My father had a brother.

E. MACKIS: A sponsor too.

G. MACKIS: If you didn't have a sponsor, like my dad had somebody here, his brother, that's why he came here.

E. MACKIS: Well, my father had my sister. That's another thing. They were going to put my dad through school because he was an accountant. He graduated from high school in Greece, which is like graduating from college here. People didn't really go that far in Greece and the government was going to put him through school to become an accountant here. He refused because in the '40s, to be on welfare was the lowest of the lowest. He would rather go on the street and sell ice cream and start a business of his own than go on welfare. They're proud. They didn't want someone else to take care of their family.

G. MACKIS: You have to realize, these guys were proud. They worked to get where they were and they didn't come here and have somebody give you

something, "Oh here's some food stamps," like they do now. Nothing against that, but I think it has gone a little too far, in my opinion. And these guys, "There's no way I'm going to get help from the government." Never, none of these guys. Some of them had to of course; I'm sure, some of them had to, didn't have a choice. But, like her. . .my father in law's case, there is no way in hell that he's going to have some guy give you. . .

E. MACKIS: You weren't a man unless you could take care of your own family.

MACKIS: And he took care of them. They lived on 54th Street right off of Central Park. They had to climb five, six floors, no elevator.

E. MACKIS: He was on sixth floor, no elevator. A lot of those older buildings they didn't have elevators and the higher you went the cheaper the rent was.

MELVIN: Well, it sounds like there are a lot of good stories here, but I think we need to cut it off. We should put you on the list Elaine.

G. MACKIS: Yeah, she's really great. She has a lot of. . .Her family, she has a lot of family here.

MELVIN: Its been a very good interview and I want to thank you both for participating.

G. MACKIS: Well I'm glad, I'm glad. Now I know there is more, but of course I could go on and on for hours.

MELVIN: Well, thanks again.

MACKIS: Pleasure.